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INFO CIS COLLECTIVE
NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0017
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0196
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RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 0091
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 0222
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

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SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK

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TAGS: PHUM KOCI ELAB UN SOCI ECON UZ

SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: POST STRONGLY SUPPORTS UNICEF DRAFT COUNTRY PROGRAM

CLASSIFIED BY: Timothy P. Buckley, Second Secretary, Department of State, Political and Economic Section; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: On May 27, the Ambassador met with UNICEF Country Representative Mahboob Shareef, who reviewed elements of the draft 2010 - 2015 country program for Uzbekistan and (protect) quietly encouraged the U.S. to vote in favor of the document at the upcoming June 10 board meeting. Shareef also reported that First Deputy Foreign Minister Karamatov's recent visit to Washington seems to have had a positive effect on other Uzbek officials with regard to engagement on child labor issues. Acting Minister of Labor and Social Protection Aktam Haitov told Shareef that "we will invite the International Labor Organization (ILO) back to Uzbekistan," the first time we here have heard of an official definitively declaring this intent. UNICEF fulfills an important role in Uzbekistan and, along with ILO, will be instrumental in long-term efforts to eliminate child labor in the agriculture sector. We support UNICEF's efforts to maintain engagement on a variety of important topics and recommend that the U.S. support the draft country program. End summary.

¶2. (U) Shareef presented the Ambassador with a copy of the 2010-2015 draft country program for Uzbekistan on May 27 and reviewed key elements of the document. Significantly, more than 40 percent of the population in this country of 28 million is under 18 years old, which highlights the importance of children's issues in Uzbekistan. Shareef said the government is paying attention, as evidenced by the fact that 55 percent of the state budget is allocated to social sectors. Often overlooked in the debate about the extent of child labor is that the school attendance rate is 96 percent, which Shareef noted puts Uzbekistan well on track to achieving Millennium Development Goal 2. Shareef said the main educational challenge for Uzbekistan is in school readiness, as only 22 percent of children nationwide attend pre-school and only 13 percent in rural areas where poverty is concentrated. Other focus areas will include upgrading the quality of education, reducing infant mortality, and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS. There will also be a sub-project devoted to eliminating child labor.

¶13. (C) Shareef said his recent meeting in Washington at the Department was very productive and he has also heard positive feedback from Uzbek interlocutors about the recent visit of First Deputy Foreign Minister Karamatov to Washington, who was the highest ranking Uzbek government official to visit the U.S. in several years. Acting Minister of Labor and Social Protection Haitov (who has been acting minister for four years) told Shareef in definitive tones that "we will invite the ILO back to Uzbekistan," which is an important indication that the Government of Uzbekistan may have moved past the protocol issues of whom should invite whom. Shareef agreed this was good news and said ILO officials were ready to travel to Tashkent to work out challenging details such as how assessments would be conducted. On June 10 there will also be a general conference at the ILO in Geneva, Switzerland which will include a side meeting about Uzbekistan. Shareef said that the Government of Uzbekistan has been invited to attend, and he believes both Acting Labor Minister Haitov and Akmal Saidov, Director of the National Human Rights Center, will participate, which Shareef said would be an important indicator of Uzbekistan's intent to engage.

¶14. (C) Shareef reminded emboffs that the child labor issue "is not going away," and referenced several stories in the international press as well as a new publication by the Environmental Justice Foundation that focus on child labor in the cotton sector in Uzbekistan. He noted that Uzbekistan seems to bear the brunt of international pressure even though there are similar issues in

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Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, but nonetheless he stated that the Uzbeks "need to be much more proactive and take concrete actions." Shareef said UNICEF will continue to convey to the host government that the issue will affect the country's economy and reputation, and he added that Uzbekistan needs to realize they cannot simply try to reduce the international pressure. In one encouraging sign, Shareef said provincial governors (hokims) are telling him that they are developing plans to employ more would-be migrant workers this year in the cotton harvest, which should help reduce the incidence of child labor.

¶15. (C) Shareef (protect) said there is no indication thus far that there will be any opposition to UNICEF's draft country program for 2010 - 2015, but he is concerned that the child labor issue may come up during the board meeting, especially given the widespread negative publicity Uzbekistan is receiving, which could prompt some board members to have second thoughts. Shareef underscored the importance of UNICEF's activities here, noting that "with the new country program, our goal will be to work together with the government to ensure that children stay in school, even during the harvest season." He expressed hope that the U.S. will support the Uzbekistan draft country program.

Comment:

¶16. (SBU) A long-term strategy is the only realistic approach to eliminating child labor in the agricultural sector in Uzbekistan, and UNICEF and ILO must have a robust presence on the ground for any plan to be effective. We are encouraged that Uzbekistan may be ready to extend an invitation soon to ILO, which will be an important step in the right direction. We strongly support the UNICEF draft country program and we recommend that the U.S. support the document at the June 10 board meeting.

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